United Nations A/54/941

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 July 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Agenda item 49 (b)
United Nations reform: measures and proposals: the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations

Letter dated 30 June 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter dated 30 June 2000 from the Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic, László Miklós, in his capacity as the President of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, concerning the Malmö Ministerial Declaration adopted at the inaugural meeting of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum, which was held from 29 to 31 May 2000 at Malmö, Sweden (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 49 (b)

(*Signed*) Igor **Vencel**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 30 June 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Letter dated 30 June 2000 from the Minister of the Environment of Slovakia addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to write to you to inform you of the successful outcome of the inaugural meeting of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum, which was held from 29 to 31 May 2000 in Malmö, Sweden.

The Forum was established by the General Assembly in response to your proposals for reform in the work of the United Nations in the areas of environment and human settlements, with the purpose of enabling the world's environment ministers to meet annually to review important and emerging environmental policy matters. Owing to the high importance accorded to environmental matters, there was an unprecedentedly large attendance at the Forum, with the overwhelming majority of delegations headed at the ministerial level.

I would, in particular, like to draw your attention to the adoption of the Malmö Ministerial Declaration, which contains the collective views of ministers of the environment on the major environmental issues facing the international community in the new millennium.

The Global Ministerial Environment Forum was particularly concerned that these matters be brought to the attention of the forthcoming Millennium Assembly, and in particular to the Millennium Summit, in accordance with the importance you have attached to the environment in your report to the General Assembly entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century" (A/54/2000). I was therefore requested by the Forum to forward the Malmö Ministerial Declaration to you, with the request that it be issued as a document of the Millennium Assembly (see appendix).

(*Signed*) László **Miklós**
Minister of Environment and
President of the Governing Council

Appendix

Malmö Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Global Ministerial Environment Forum, held at Malmö, Sweden, from 29 to 31 May 2000

We, Ministers of Environment and heads of delegation meeting in Malmö, Sweden from 29 to 31 May 2000, on the occasion of the first Global Ministerial Environment Forum, held in pursuance of United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/242 of 28 July 1999 to enable the world's environment ministers to gather to review important and emerging environmental issues and to chart the course for the future:

Recalling the Stockholm Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment 1/ and the Rio Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 2/ the Declaration of Barbados on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States 3/ as well as the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, 4/

Deeply concerned that, despite the many successful and continuing efforts of the international community since the Stockholm Conference, and some progress having been achieved, the environment and the natural resource base that supports life on Earth continue to deteriorate at an alarming rate,

Reaffirming the importance of the speedy implementation of the political and legal commitments entered into by the international community, in particular at the Rio Conference,

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.73.II.A.14), part one, chap. I.

2/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8), vol. I, annex I.

3/ Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/CONF.167/9), annex I.

4/ Governing Council decision 19/1, annex.

Convinced that urgent and renewed efforts are required to be undertaken by all countries in a spirit of international solidarity, and recognizing, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibility as contained in the Rio Principles to manage the environment so as to promote sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations,

Conscious that the root causes of global environmental degradation are embedded in social and economic problems such as pervasive poverty, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, inequity in distribution of wealth, and the debt burden,

Also conscious that success in combating environmental degradation is dependent on the full participation of all actors in society, an aware and educated population, respect for ethical and spiritual values and cultural diversity, and protection of indigenous knowledge,

Aware that the 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 to be conducted in 2002 will provide a further opportunity for the international community to take action to implement its commitments and to strengthen international cooperation urgently required to address the challenges of sustainable development in the twenty-first century,

Convinced that the Millennium Summit of the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly provides a unique opportunity to address at the highest level the role of the United Nations in the field of sustainable development, and noting in this regard the proposals of the Secretary-General of the United Nations as contained in his report "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century", 5/ which will serve as the basis of discussion at the Summit,

Determined to contribute to this historic endeavour from an environmental perspective, and having requested the President of the Governing Council to bring the following matters to the attention of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, the Millennium Assembly,

Declare that:

Major environmental challenges of the twenty-first century

1. The year 2000 marks a defining moment in the efforts of the international community to ensure that the growing trends of environmental degradation that threaten the sustainability of the planet are arrested and reversed. Hence there is an urgent need for reinvigorated international cooperation based on common concerns and a spirit of international partnership and solidarity.

2. There is an alarming discrepancy between commitments and action. Goals and targets agreed by the international community in relation to sustainable development, such as the adoption of national sustainable development strategies and increased support to developing countries, must be implemented in a timely fashion. The mobilization of domestic and international resources, including development

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assistance, far beyond current levels is vital to the success of this endeavour.

3. The evolving framework of international environmental law and the development of national law provide a sound basis for addressing the major environmental threats of the day. It must be underpinned by a more coherent and coordinated approach among international environmental instruments. We must also recognize the central importance of environmental compliance, enforcement and liability, and promote the observation of the precautionary approach as contained in the Rio Principles, 2/ and other important policy tools, as well as capacity-building.

4. The Global Environment Outlook 2000 of the United Nations Environment Programme provides a compelling assessment of the serious nature of the environmental threats faced by the international community. Special attention should be paid to unsustainable consumption patterns among the richer segments in all countries, particularly developed countries. Environmental stewardship is lagging behind economic and social development, and a rapidly growing population is placing increased pressures on the environment.

5. Environmental threats resulting from the accelerating trends of urbanization and the development of megacities, the tremendous risk of climate change, the freshwater crisis and its consequences for food security and the environment, the unsustainable exploitation and depletion of biological resources, drought and desertification, and uncontrolled deforestation, increasing environmental emergencies, the risk to human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals, and land-based sources of pollution, are all issues that need to be addressed.

6. Opportunities however exist that can redress this situation. Technological innovation and the emergence of new resource-efficient technologies, in which the private sector plays a major role, provide a source of great hope and increased opportunities to avoid the environmentally destructive practices of the past, including through clean technologies.

7. To confront the underlying causes of environmental degradation and poverty, we must integrate environmental considerations in the mainstream of decision-making. We must also intensify our efforts in developing preventive action and a concerted response, including national environmental governance and the international rule of law, awareness-raising and education, and harness the power of information technology to this end. All actors involved must work together in the interest of a sustainable future.

8. It is necessary that the environmental perspective is taken into account in both the design and the assessment of macro-economic policy-making, as well as practices of government and multilateral lending and credit institutions such as export credit agencies.

9. The trends of globalization in the world economy, with the attendant environmental risks and opportunities, require international institutions to adopt new approaches and to engage the major actors involved in globalization in new ways. We should encourage a balanced and integrated approach to trade and environment policies in pursuit of sustainable development, in accordance with the decision of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eighth session.

10. The role and responsibility of nations based on the Rio Principles, as well as the role and responsibility of the main actors including Governments, the private sector and civil society, must be emphasized in addressing the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. Governments are the primary agents in this process, whose actions are vital in implementing United Nations environment-related instruments since Stockholm, institutional capacity-building and strengthened international cooperation.

The private sector and the environment

11. The private sector has emerged as a global actor that has a significant impact on environmental trends through its investment and technology decisions. In this regard, Governments have a crucial role in creating an enabling environment. The institutional and regulatory capacities of Governments to interact with the private sector should be enhanced. A greater commitment by the private sector should be pursued to engender a new culture of environmental accountability through the application of the polluter-pays principle, environmental performance indicators and reporting, and the establishment of a precautionary approach in investment and technology decisions. This approach must be linked to the development of cleaner and more resource-efficient technologies for a life cycle economy and efforts to facilitate the transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

12. The potential of the new economy to contribute to sustainable development should be further pursued, particularly in the areas of information technology, biology and biotechnology. The ethical and social implications must be carefully considered. There must be recognition of the public interest in knowledge related to biodiversity, including the interest of indigenous and local communities. A corporate ethic guided by public interest should be promoted.

13. The Global Compact established by the Secretary-General of the United Nations with the private sector provides an excellent vehicle for the development of a constructive engagement with the private sector. UNEP should continue to enhance its engagement and collaboration with the private sector and consider the relation between foreign direct investment and the environment, with a view to minimizing negative environmental implications.

Civil society and the environment

14. Civil society plays a critically important role in addressing environmental issues. The role, capabilities and involvement of civil society organizations has seen a substantial increase over recent years, which highlights the need for national Governments and for UNEP and international organizations to enhance the engagement of these organizations in their work on environmental matters.

15. Civil society has found new and effective modes of expression of popular sentiments and concerns. It provides a powerful agent for promoting shared environmental purpose and values. Civil society plays an important role in bringing emerging environmental issues to the attention of policy makers, raising public awareness, promoting innovative ideas and approaches, and promoting transparency as well as non-corrupt activities in environmental decision-making.

16. The role of civil society at all levels should be strengthened through freedom of access to environmental information to all, broad participation in environmental decision-making, as well as access to justice on environmental issues. Governments should promote conditions to facilitate the ability of all parts of society to have a voice and to play an active role in creating a sustainable future.

17. Science provides the basis for environmental decision-making. There is a need for intensified research, fuller engagement of the scientific community and increased scientific cooperation on emerging environmental issues, as well as improved avenues for communication between the scientific community, decision makers and other stakeholders.

18. We must pay special attention to threats to cultural diversity and traditional knowledge, in particular of indigenous and local communities, which may be posed by globalization. In this context we welcome the proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly of the year 2001 as the International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

19. Greater emphasis must be given to the gender perspective in decision-making concerning the management of the environment and natural resources.

20. There is a need for independent and objective media at all levels in enhancing awareness and developing shared environmental values in global society. The media can serve the cause of sustainable development by identifying emerging issues, awareness-raising and promoting appropriate action.

The 2002 review of UNCED

21. The 2002 review of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) should be undertaken by an international conference at the summit level. The objective should not be to renegotiate Agenda 21, which remains valid, but to inject a new spirit of cooperation and urgency based on agreed actions in the common quest for sustainable development. In this regard, the ratification of all environmental conventions and protocols, in particular those related to climate, desertification, biosafety and chemicals, should be urgently pursued by Governments.

22. Governments and UNEP have to play a major role in the preparation for the 2002 review of UNCED at the regional and global levels and ensure that the environmental dimension of sustainable development is fully considered on the basis of a broad assessment of the state of the global environment. The preparations for the conference should be accelerated.

23. The 2002 conference should aim at addressing the major challenges to sustainable development, and in particular the pervasive effects of the burden of poverty on a large proportion of the Earth's inhabitants, counterposed against excessive and wasteful consumption and inefficient resource use that perpetuate the vicious circle of environmental degradation and increasing poverty.

24. The 2002 conference should review the requirements for a greatly strengthened institutional

structure for international environmental governance based on an assessment of future needs for an institutional architecture that has the capacity to effectively address wide-ranging environmental threats in a globalizing world. UNEP's role in this regard should be strengthened and its financial base broadened and made more predictable.

Conclusion

25. At the dawn of this new century, we have at our disposal the human and material resources to achieve sustainable development, not as an abstract concept but as a concrete reality. The unprecedented developments in production and information technologies, the emergence of a younger generation with a clear sense of optimism, solidarity and values, women increasingly aware and with an enhanced and active role in society - all point to the emergence of a new consciousness. We can decrease poverty by half by 2015 without degrading the environment, we can ensure environmental security through early warning, we can better integrate environmental considerations in economic policy, we can better coordinate legal instruments and we can realize a vision of a world without slums. We commit ourselves to realizing this common vision.